

Tim and the Hidden People

Tim in Hiding

Sheila K. McCullagh

Illustrated by Pat Cook



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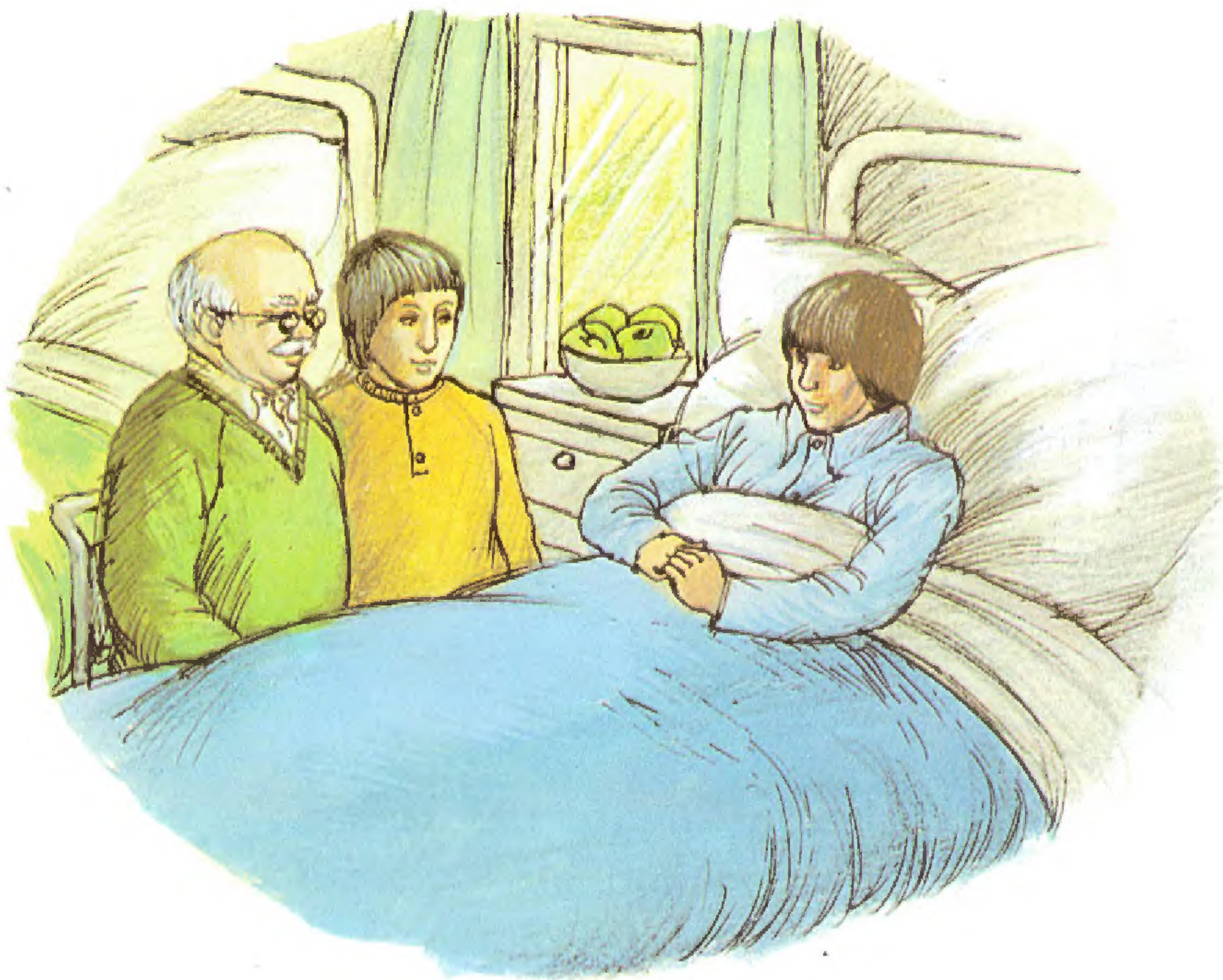
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Nelson



Tim was asleep and dreaming. In his dreams, someone was calling him.

“Tim! Tim! It’s time you were up.”

He opened his eyes slowly. The room seemed very bright. The light hurt his eyes.

Sebastian was curled up at his feet. Tim moved his hand, and felt something hard at his side. He remembered the silver string. He sat up, pulled out the wooden box, and took off the tiger lid. The silver string shone brightly.

“Tim! Tim! Are you up? It’s late.”

That was Aunt May’s voice, calling up the stairs.

“Coming,” he shouted back.

“You be quick,” called Aunt May. “Your breakfast’s ready, and I can’t wait all day.”

Tim got slowly out of bed. His throat hurt. When he washed his face, he found that his neck hurt a bit, too, if he pressed it.

Tim pulled on his clothes. He must get Sebastian outside before anyone saw him.

He tucked a sleepy Sebastian under his jacket. He was just going downstairs, when he remembered the box. He couldn’t leave that in his room. He put Sebastian back on the bed, and got out an old canvas shoulder bag he took to school. He put the box in the bag and slipped it on his shoulder. Then he picked Sebastian up again, and went downstairs.

No one was in the hall. He opened the front door.





Mr. Berryman was just coming in at the gate. Sebastian jumped out of Tim's arms, and ran to meet him.

“Hallo, Sebastian,” said Mr. Berryman.
“Hallo, Tim. I was just coming to ask if you’d seen Sebastian. He hasn’t been home for three days. Has he been with you all the time?”

Mr. Berryman bent down to stroke Sebastian, who was rubbing himself against his legs.

Tim shook his head. “Just at night,” he said. “Sebastian was out in the daytime.”

Mr. Berryman looked up quickly.

“Are you all right, Tim?” he asked.

Aunt May came up from the kitchen.

“Tim, come and have your breakfast,” she said crossly. “I’m sorry, Mr. Berryman, but I’m going out. I don’t know what’s got into Tim this morning.”

“I don’t want any breakfast,” said Tim. He felt hot and tired, and his legs felt queer.

“Don’t talk to me like that,” said Aunt May.

“I think the boy’s ill,” said Mr. Berryman. “You’d better go back to bed, Tim.”

Aunt May looked at him. “You do look a bit queer,” she said. “How do you feel?”

“I’m all right,” said Tim. “But I think I’ll go to bed.”

As he went upstairs, he heard Mr. Berryman say, “You should get a doctor to see that boy. He’s ill.”



Tim was glad to get back into bed.

He lay there with the canvas bag at his side. He felt very hot. His eyes hurt when he looked at the window, so he shut them. He drifted off to sleep.

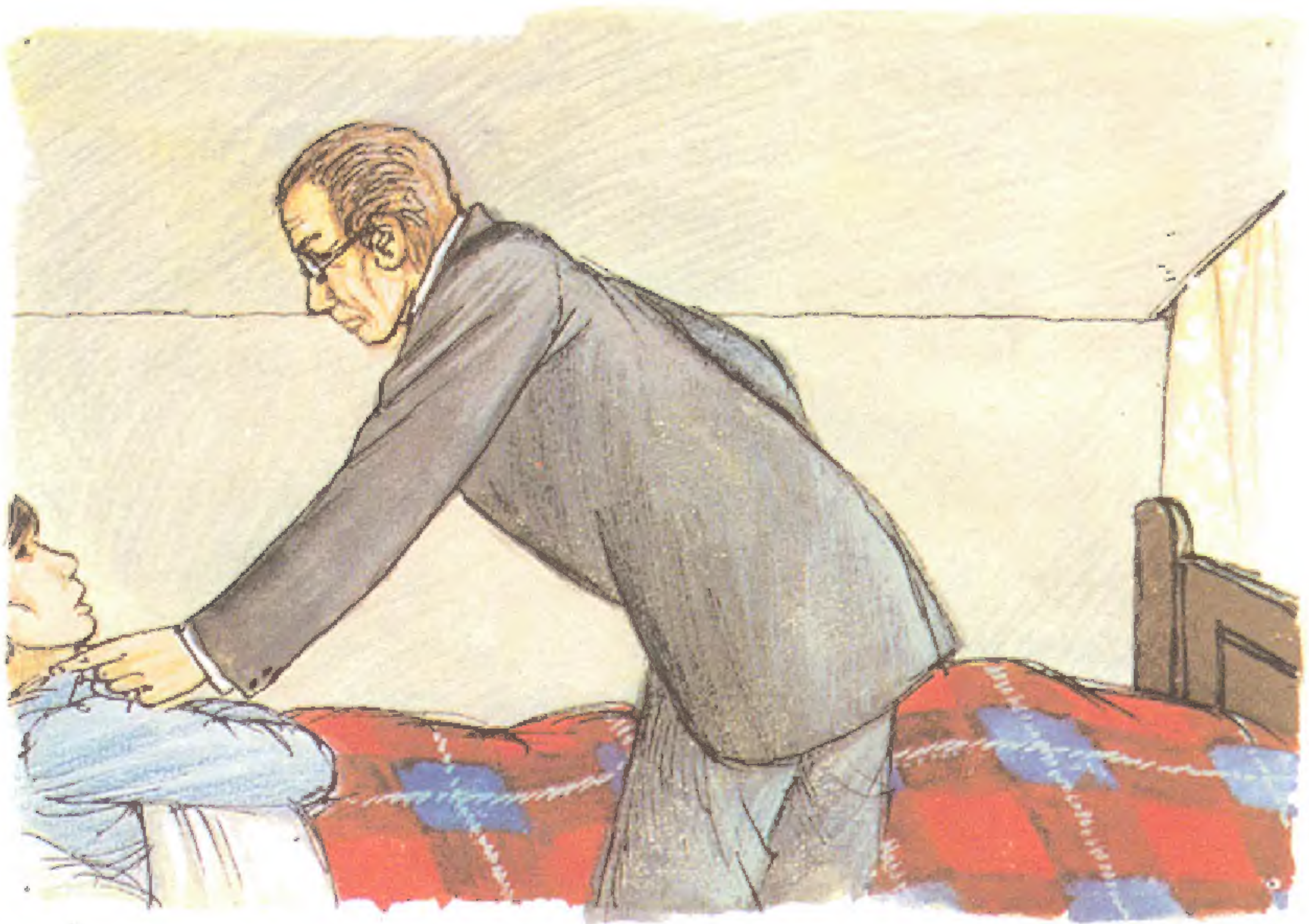
He woke up to find a doctor and Aunt May standing by his bed.

“Well, Tim,” said the doctor. “How do you feel?”

“All right,” said Tim.

“I’m glad to hear it,” said the doctor. “But I think we’ll just make sure.”

The doctor pushed a thermometer into his mouth, and held his wrist. After a minute, he looked at the thermometer, shook it, and put it away.



The doctor bent forward, and felt Tim's neck. "Does it hurt?" he asked.

Tim nodded.

"Does your throat hurt?" asked the doctor.

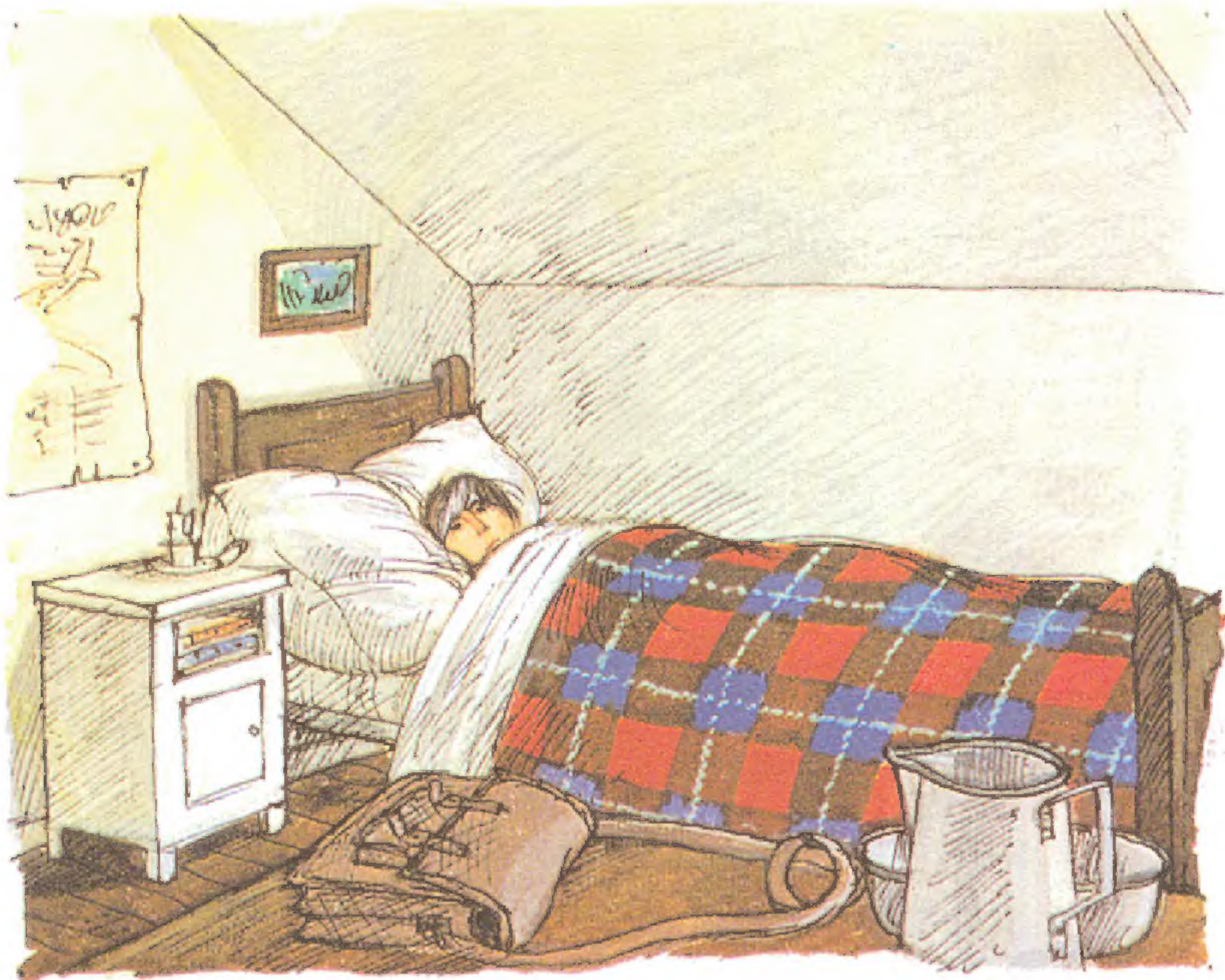
Tim nodded again.

"I think we'll have you in hospital for a day or two, Tim," said the doctor. "Just to see how you are."

"What's wrong with him?" said Aunt May. "He'll be all right, won't he?"

"He'll be fine," said the doctor. "But we'll have him in for a day or two to make sure. I'll send an ambulance."

They went out.



Tim lay there, thinking. And then he suddenly sat up in bed. He remembered what Melinda had said: "Tomorrow, you will be in hiding." He'd be in hiding in a hospital all right. But he must take the silver string with him.

Tim slipped out of bed, got some clean pyjamas and a pullover out of a drawer, and pushed them into the canvas bag on top of the box.

He put the bag on the table, and climbed back into bed again.

He wondered what the doctor would say if he told him that he wasn't ill at all? That it was just Melinda's way of keeping him safe? The doctor would think he was *very* ill, if he told him about the Hidden People!

Tim began to laugh, but his throat hurt, and he stopped. Melinda had made a good job of it. He did feel ill.

The ambulance wasn't long in coming. Two men came upstairs to his room.

Tim sat up and swung his legs out of bed. He felt very shaky.

"I think we'll just take you down in a chair, son," said one of the men. "That'll go down the stairs."

"I'll take my things," said Tim, picking up the canvas bag.

They bundled him up in a blanket, and carried him downstairs.

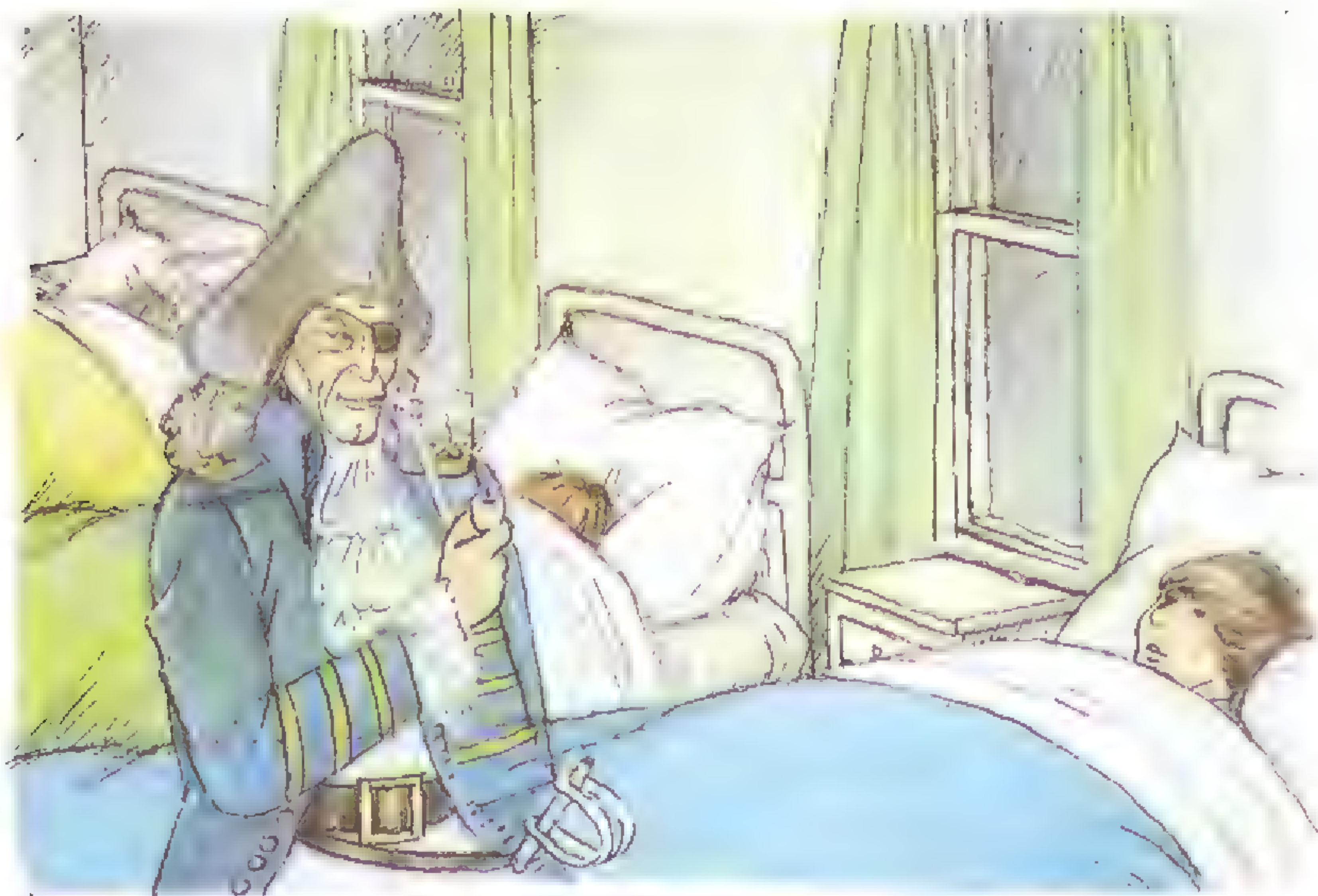




Tim saw Sebastian in The Yard, just as they put him into the ambulance.

One of the men got in with him, and away they went.

Tim didn't remember much of the ride, or getting to the hospital. He remembered putting the canvas bag into a locker by his bed. He remembered a nurse tucking him in. But then he went to sleep again, and slept for a long time.



When Tim woke up, it was getting dark. A light was on in the ward, and Captain Jory was sitting on the foot of his bed.

Tim stared at him.

Captain Jory was smoking his long pipe and smiling cheerfully, as if he was very much at home.

“Well, Tim, and how are you?” he asked.

“I’m feeling much better,” said Tim. His eyes no longer hurt and his throat wasn’t sore any more.

“That’s good,” said Captain Jory. “I thought Melinda was overdoing it a bit.”

“I thought it was Melinda,” said Tim.



A nurse came along the ward.

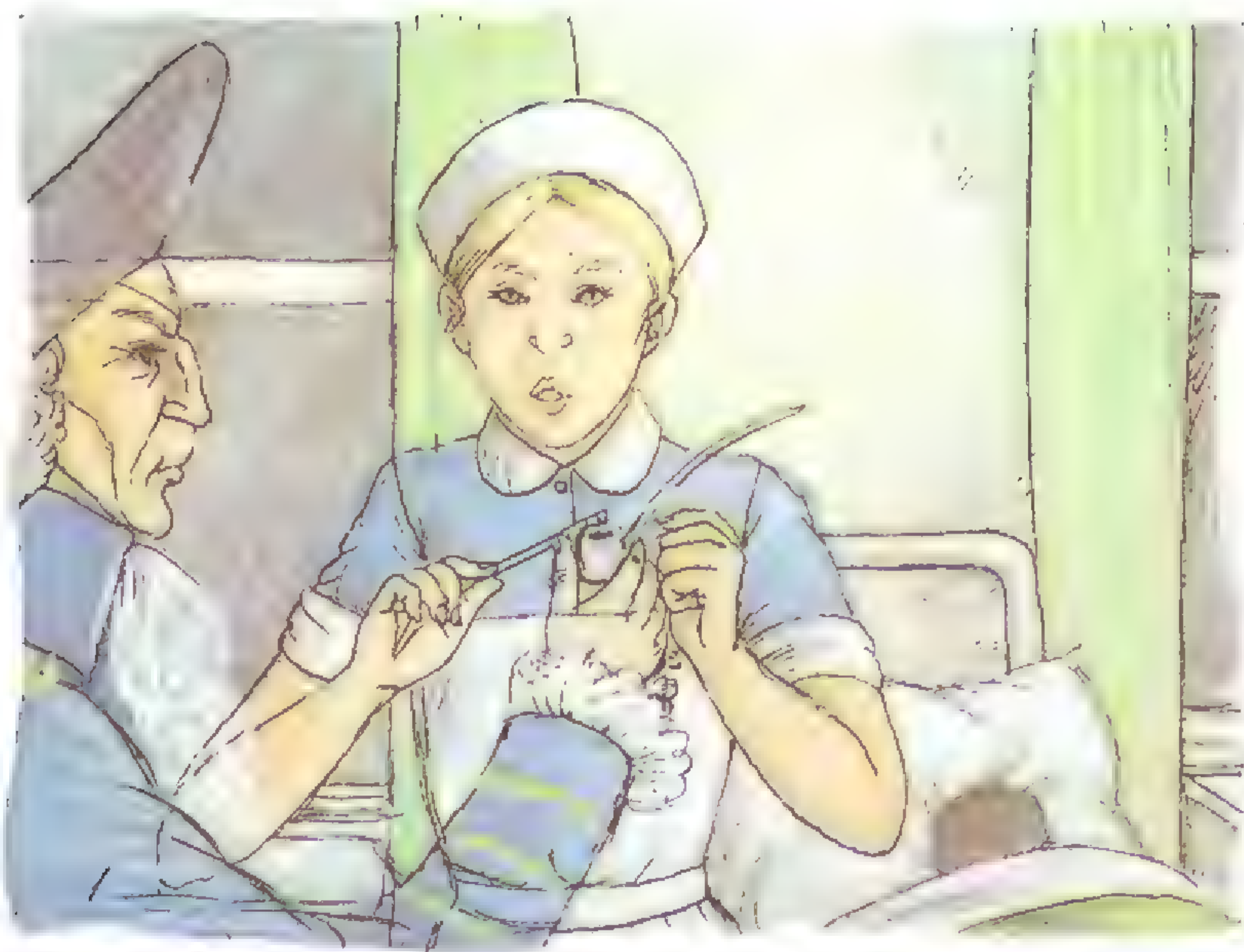
“How are you, Tim?” she asked.

“Better,” said Tim.

The nurse laughed. “That was quick,” she said. “We’ll soon see.”

She put a thermometer in his mouth.

Captain Jory sat on the foot of the bed, puffing his pipe and watching her.



The nurse took the thermometer out. She was just going to look at it, when the boy in the next bed spoke to her.

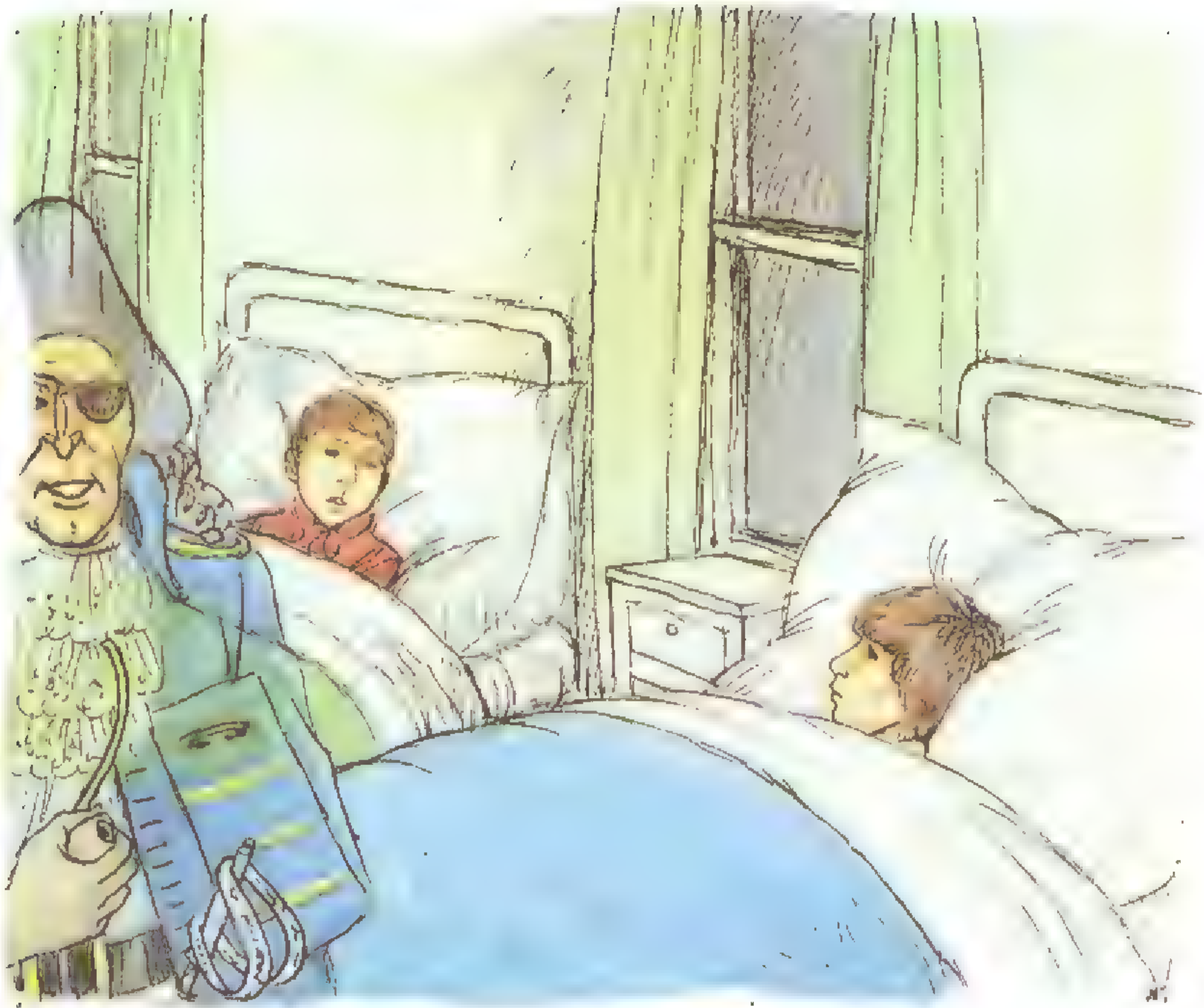
“He’s silly,” said the boy, nodding at Tim. “He talks to himself.”

The nurse looked at Tim quickly.

In a flash, Captain Jory leant forward and put the hot bowl of his pipe against the thermometer.

“Are you sure you’re all right, Tim?” asked the nurse.

She looked at the thermometer. She gave a little gasp.



Captain Jory leant back, laughing to himself.
“Lie down, Tim, and let me cover you up,”
said the nurse. “You’re not to sit up. You just
lie there quietly.”

She went off down the ward, and Tim saw
her talking to another nurse in a blue uniform.

“That’s the sister,” said the boy in the next
bed. “What’s wrong with you?”

“I don’t know,” said Tim. “I’m all right.”

“Huh! That’s what *you* think,” said the boy.



“Well, Tim, I think that should keep you here for a few days,” said Captain Jory, getting off the bed. “In fact, I think it should keep you here till Friday.”

“Friday?” asked Tim.

“The night of the full moon,” said Captain Jory. “I’ll be getting along now.”

He nodded to Tim, and walked off down the ward.

Tim watched him go, but he didn’t say anything. He remembered the boy in the next bed.



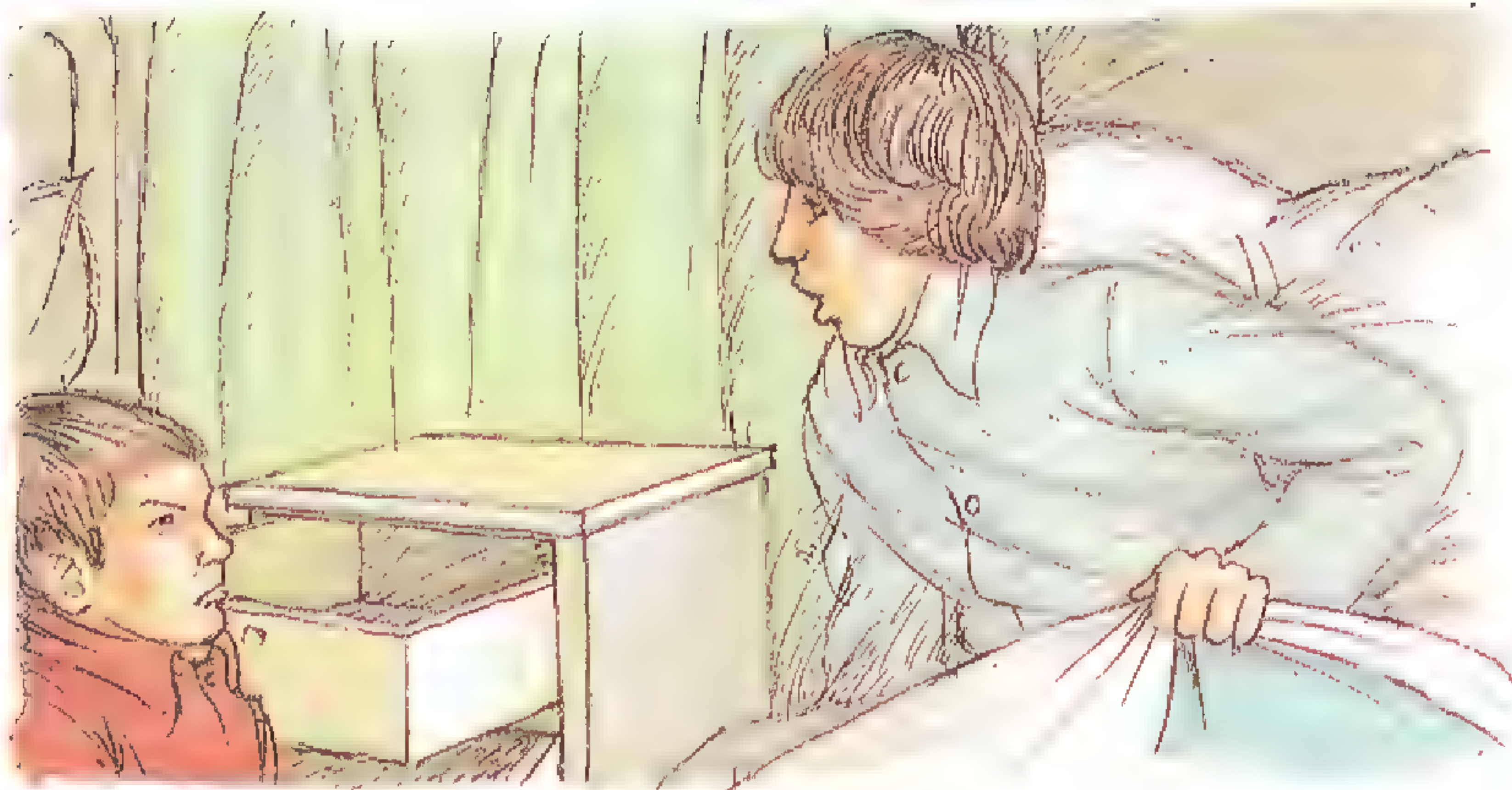
When Tim woke up, it was night, but there was a light on low in the ward.

For a moment, he wondered where he was.

Then he remembered.

He heard a sound, and looked down.

The boy had got out of the next bed. He was looking in Tim's locker! He had taken out Tim's canvas bag, and was just opening it.



“You leave that alone!” said Tim, sitting up. “What do you think you’re doing?” He swung his legs sideways out of bed, and grabbed the bag.

The boy pushed him over without a word, and scrambled back into bed.

Tim got up. He took the box with the tiger lid out of the canvas bag, and slipped it into his bed. Then he put the bag back in the locker.

The ward was very still. The door at the end was open, and he could see the nurse doing something outside.

He got back into bed and lay down with his hand on the box. He could feel his heart beating very fast. He shut his eyes, but it was a long time before he went back to sleep.

When Tim next woke up, it was still night. Tobias was sitting on the end of the bed, looking at him.

“Hallo, Tobias,” said Tim, sitting up.

“You’re in a good place here, Tim,” said Tobias. “The Yard is dangerous, just now.”

“How’s Arun?” asked Tim quickly.

“Oh, *he’s* all right,” said Tobias. “They’re not looking for *him*. But the wild witches are out, Tim, and they’re looking for someone—or something. I don’t know what, but I expect you do. Melinda’s very clever. The wild witches will never come here.”

Tim hoped he was right.

“How’s Sebastian?” he asked.

“He’s all right, too,” said Tobias. “He’s looking after Arun. I’m afraid that cat takes after his mother. He looks after people all the time. But he did trip Mr. Bunce up yesterday. That’s something. Mr. Bunce sat down *very* hard.”

Tim laughed.





The night nurse came quickly down the ward.
“Lie down, Tim,” she said softly. “You’re all right.”

“I know I am,” said Tim.

“You were just having a dream,” said the nurse. “There’s no one there.”

Tim couldn’t help laughing again. Tobias was dancing about in the air, just over the nurse’s head.



“He’s talking to himself again,” said a voice from the next bed. “Or else he’s seeing things. Silly, that’s what he is!”

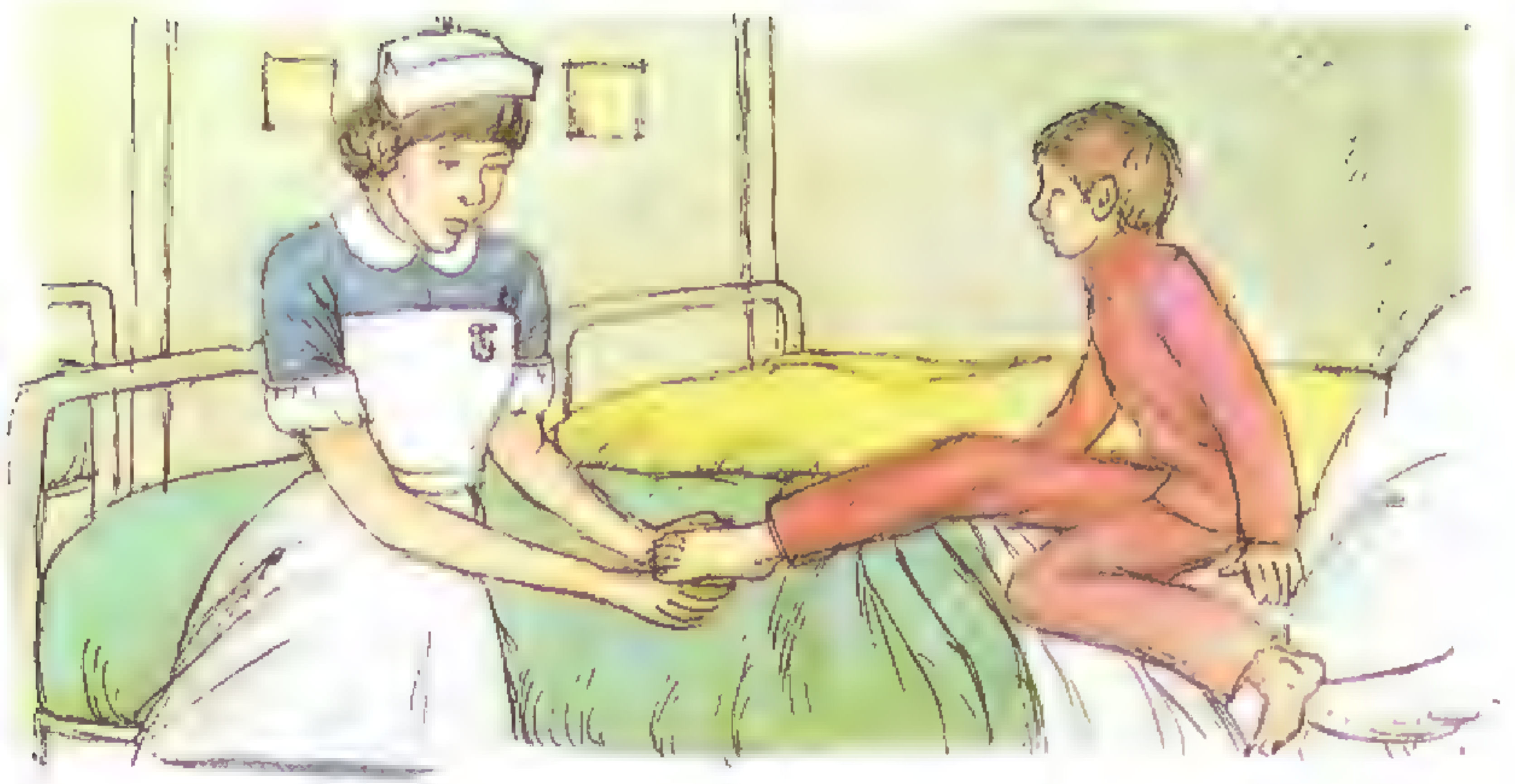
The nurse turned to the boy in the next bed. “You be quiet and go to sleep, Fred,” she said. She sounded quite cross.

“Now, Tim.” Her voice was friendly again. “You lie down, too. There’s no one there. You were just dreaming. I’ll be here in the ward all night. Call me if you want me.”

Tim lay down. The nurse tucked him in, and went back to the room at the end of the ward.



Tobias landed on the end of the next bed.
Fred's foot was sticking up under the bed-clothes, and Tim saw Tobias run his claws into the boy's big toe.
Fred let out a yell, and the nurse came running back.



“Whatever is the matter?” she asked.

“Something bit my toe,” said Fred.

“Let me look,” said the nurse.

The boy pulled out his foot, and the nurse looked at it.

“You’re all right,” she said. “Now go to sleep, and don’t let me hear any more from you tonight.”

She went back down the ward.

“Goodnight, Tim,” said Tobias. “You stay here as long as you can. It’s the safest place.”

“Goodnight,” said Tim.

“I’m not speaking to you,” said the boy in the next bed.

Tobias went off down the ward, and Tim went back to sleep.



Tim was much better the next day. There was no Captain Jory about to play tricks with the thermometer, and no Tobias.

The boy in the next bed went home.

Aunt May looked in to see Tim in the morning, but she couldn't stay long.

"I've been talking to the nurse," she said. "You'll be home on Friday, Tim."

“Yes, I know,” said Tim.

“Oh – well, the nurse said I was to tell you,” said Aunt May. She left him some apples, and went off.

Next day, Mr. Berryman and Arun came to see him. Mr. Berryman went off to talk to the ward sister.

“How’s everything in The Yard?” asked Tim.

“I’m all right, and so is Sebastian,” said Arun. “Sebastian seems to have moved in with us. He’s always with me. But I keep seeing shadows in The Yard, Tim. I think you’re best here for a bit.”

“I shall be back on Friday,” said Tim. “I saw Melinda. I have to go out on Friday night.”

“Where?” asked Arun.

“Past Hollow Hill,” said Tim.

“I’ll come with you,” said Arun.

Tim shook his head. “Melinda says I must go alone,” he said.

Mr. Berryman came over to them, and they talked about other things until it was time for Arun and Mr. Berryman to go.



Tim was back in The Yard on Friday. He got home in time for a late tea. He had hoped to see Arun, but Aunt May sent him up to bed as soon as tea was over.

“You’ve got to be careful, Tim,” she said. “That’s what the doctor said. I don’t want you back in that hospital.”

Tim went up to his room, but he didn’t go to bed. He stood by the window, looking down into The Yard.



He saw Aunt May go out. It began to get dark.

There were shadows under the old tree. Tim wasn't sure what they were, but he didn't much like the look of them.

He opened his canvas bag, and took out the wooden box with the tiger lid. He opened the box. The silver string shone so brightly that it seemed to light the room.

He took out the three silver coins and put them in his pocket.



Then he shut the box and put it back in the bag. He put on his jacket, slipped the bag over his shoulder, and crept downstairs.

Mr. Bunce was out, but Miss Miff was in her room. Tim took off his shoes, and crept softly past her door.

He slid back the bolt on the back door. He slipped outside and closed the door softly behind him. In a few moments he had put on his shoes, and was out in the lane.

He looked up and down, but there was no one in sight. He slipped along the lane to the street. There were no Hidden People about. Tim crossed the road, and set off along the canal.



There were people about in the town, and the lights were coming on in the windows. The streets were full of cars and lorries. But as he went along. Tim began to feel that he was being watched.

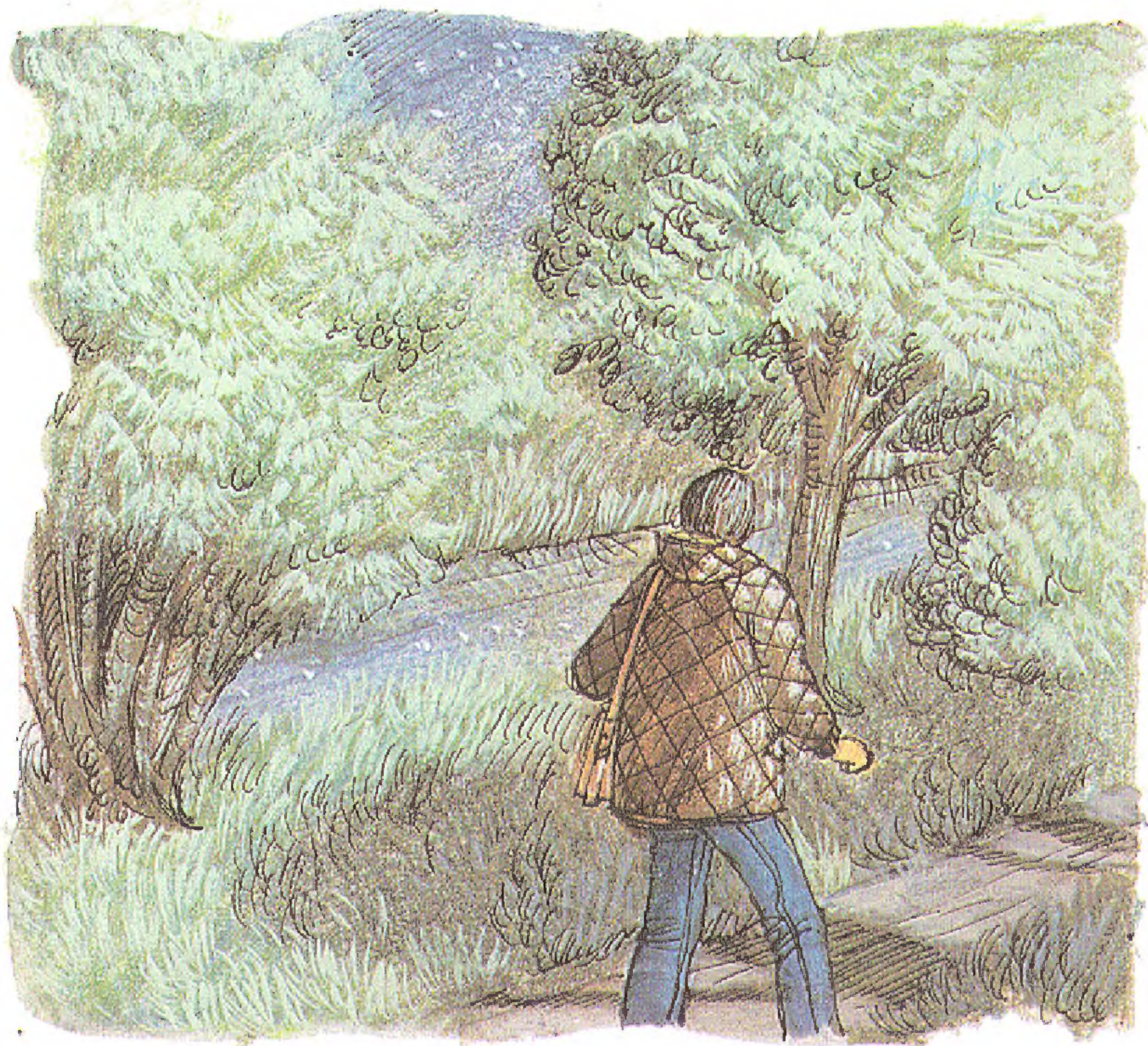
He stopped suddenly, and turned round.



A man in a three-cornered hat was standing on the street corner. Tim saw him for a moment, and then he was lost in a crowd of men who came out of a lighted doorway.

Tim shivered.

He went on, looking over his shoulder from time to time, but he didn't see the man again.



The stars were out by the time Tim had left the town behind him. He set off along the canal bank, under the trees.

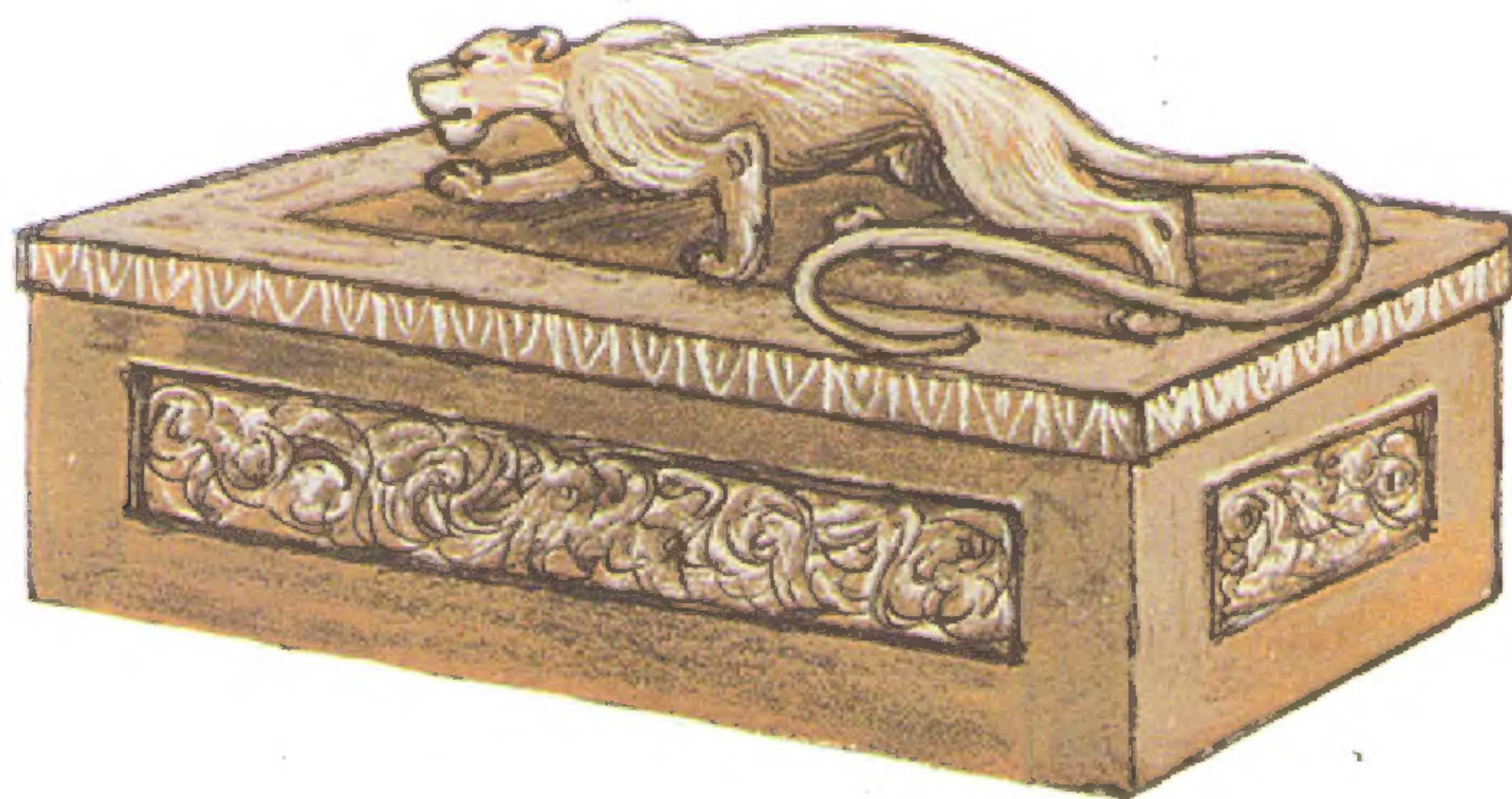
The moon was rising. It hung in the sky like a great, round, yellow lantern.

By the time he got to the lock gates, the moon was high up over the trees, shining like bright silver. The shadows of the trees fell black across the path.

Tim sat down on the lock gates to rest. He was feeling tired. He had saved an apple from the ones Aunt May had given him in hospital. He sat there until he had finished it.

Then he opened the canvas bag, and pushed his hand in until he could feel the wooden box. He was glad it was there. In some strange way, he felt better when he touched it.

Tim slung the canvas bag over his shoulder again, and set off along the path.



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